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PERKINS, ALICE  
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THE HOOPER COLLECTION  
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

# THE STUDY OF HISTORY.

## A Lecture

DELIVERED BY

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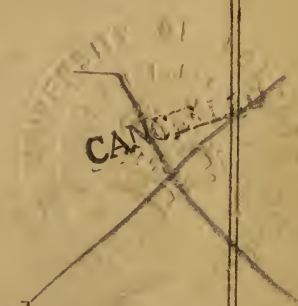
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JUNE, MDCCC LIX.

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[Printed for private circulation.]



## PREFACE.

*Some friends, who did not hear this Lecture, having expressed a wish to see it, I have had a few copies printed. It treats, as the conditions of the controversy require, merely of the natural aspect of History, excluding from view the question of a Revelation. I am well aware of its incompleteness, while I hope that, so far as it goes, it may be found true.*

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## THE STUDY OF HISTORY.

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THE first question which the student of history has now to ask himself is, Whether history is governed by necessary laws? If it is, it ought to be written and read as a science. It may be an imperfect science as yet, owing to the complexity of the phenomena, the incompleteness of the observations, the want of a rational method; but, in its nature, it is a science, and is capable of being brought to perfection.

History could not be studied as a whole,—there could be no philosophy of history,—till we thoroughly felt the unity of the human race. That great discovery is one which rebukes the pretensions of individual genius to be the sole source of progress, for it was made not by one man, but by mankind. Kindled by no single mind, it dawned upon the world like the light of morning; and that prism must be the work of a cunning hand which could discriminate the blended rays of duty, interest, and affection. First, perhaps, the greatness of the Roman character broke through the narrow exclusiveness of savage nationality when it bent in its hour of conquest to the intellect of conquered Greece; nobler in this than Greece herself, who, with all her philosophy, talked to the last of Greek and barbarian, and could never see the man beneath the slave. First, perhaps, on the mind of the Roman Stoic the great idea of the community of man, with its universal rights and duties, distinctly though

faintly dawned. And therefore to the Roman stoic it was given to be the real author of Rome's greatest gift, the science of universal law. Christianity broke down far more thoroughly the barriers between nation and nation, between freeman and slave, for those who were or might come within her pale. Between those within and those without the pale she put perhaps a deeper and wider gulf; not in the times of the apostles, but in the succeeding times of fierce conflict with heathen vice and persecution, and still more in the fanatical and crusading middle ages. The resurrection of Greece and Rome made the world one again, and united at once the Christian to the heathen, and the present to the remotest past. The heathen moralist, teaching now in his own person and not in the disguise of a school divine, the heathen historian awakening Christian sympathies, the heathen poet touching Christian hearts, shewed that in morality, in sympathy, in heart, though not in faith, the Christian and the heathen were one. That sense of unity, traversing all distinctions between Christian and pagan, and between the Churches of divided Christendom, has grown with the growth of philosophy, science, jurisprudence, literature, art, the common and indivisible heritage of man. A more enlightened and humane diplomacy and the gradual ascendancy of international law have strengthened the sense of common interests and universal justice from which they sprang; and France, the eldest daughter of the Church, has crusaded to save the Crescent from the aggression of the Cross. Commerce, too, breaking link by link its mediæval fetters, has helped to knit nations together in sympathy as well as by interest, and to remove the barriers of the dividing mountains and the estranging sea. There

was needed, besides, a great and varied range of recorded history to awaken thoroughly the historic sense, to furnish abundant matter for historical reflection, and to arouse a lively curiosity as to the relation between the present and the past. There was needed a habit of methodical investigation, with a view to real results, of which physical science seems the great school. There was needed a knowledge, which could only come from the same source, of the physical conditions and accessories of man's estate. These conditions fulfilled, the philosophy of history arose, opening a new realm of thought, full, we can scarcely doubt, of great results for man. Vico indeed was the precursor of this philosophy. In his mind first arose the thought, awakened by the study of Greek and Roman antiquity, that history should be read as a whole, and that this whole might have a law. But the law he imagined, that of revolving cycles of men and events, was wild and fruitless as a dream.

It was natural that physical science should claim the philosophy of history as a part of her own domain, that she should hasten to plant her flag upon this newly-discovered land of thought. Flushed with un hoped-for triumphs, why should she not here also triumph beyond hope? She scorns to see her advance arrested by the imagined barrier between the physical and moral world. The phenomena of man's life and history are complicated, indeed, more complicated even than those of the tides or of the weather; but the phenomena of the tides and of the weather have yielded or are yielding to close observation, well recorded statistics, and patient reasoning; why should not the phenomena of man's actions yield too, and life and history be filled, like all the world besides, with

the calm majesty of natural law? It is a grand thought; and at this time it finds not only minds open to its grandeur, but hearts ready to welcome it. Western Christendom has long been heaving with a mighty earthquake of opinion, only less tremendous than that of the Reformation because there was no edifice so vast and solid as mediæval Catholicism to be laid low by the shock. Some their fear of this earthquake has driven to take refuge in ancient fanes, and by altars whose fires are cold. Others are filled with a Lucretian longing to repose under the tranquil reign of physical necessity, to become a part of the material world, and to cast their perplexities on the popes and hierarchs of science and her laws. Only let them be sure that what is august and tranquillizing in law really belongs to science, and that it is not borrowed by her from another source. Let them be sure that in putting off the dignity, they also put off the burden of humanity. If man is no higher in his destinies than the beast or the blade of grass, it may be better to be a beast or a blade of grass than a man.

History is made up of human actions, whether those actions are political, social, religious, military, or of any other kind. The founding and maintaining of institutions, the passing and keeping of laws, the erecting and preserving of churches and forms of worship, the instituting and observing of social customs, may be all resolved into the element of action. So may all intellectual history, whether of speculation, observation, or composition, with their products and effects; the bending of the mind to thought being in every respect as much an action as the moving of the hand. What we call national actions, are the actions of a multitude of men acting severally though



concurrently, and with all the incidents of several action; or they are the actions of those men who are in power. Whatever there is in action, therefore, will be everywhere present in history; and the founders of the new physical science of history have to lay the foundations of their science in what seems the quicksand of free-will.

This difficulty they have to meet either by shewing that free-will is an illusion, or by shewing that its presence throughout history is compatible, in spite of all appearances, with the existence of an exact historical science.

They take both lines. Some say 'Free-will is an illusion, or, at least, we cannot be sure that it is real. Our only knowledge of it is derived from consciousness, and good authorities say that consciousness is no faculty. Besides, the mind cannot observe itself: it is not in nature that the same thing should be at once observer and observed.'

Consciousness may be no faculty, but from what other source do those who call consciousness no faculty derive the knowledge of their own existence? From what other source do they derive the knowledge that their words, the very words they use in this denial, correspond to their thoughts, and will convey their thoughts to others? The mind may not be able to place itself on the table before it, or look at itself through a microscope, and there may be nothing else in nature like its power of self-observation; possibly the term self-observation, being figurative, may not adequately represent the fact, and may even, if pressed, involve some confusion of ideas. But he is scarcely a philosopher who fancies that the peculiarity of a mental fact, or our want of an adequate name for it,

is a good reason for setting the fact aside. The same writers constantly speak of the phenomena of mind ; so that it appears there must be some phenomena of mind which they have been able to observe. In whose mind did they see these phenomena? Did they see them in the minds of others, or, by self-observation, in their own?

But others say, 'We admit the reality of free-will ; but the opposite to free-will is necessity, and to form the foundation of our science, we do not want necessity, but only causation and the certainty which causation carries with it: necessity is a mysterious and embarrassing word, let us put it out of the question.' But then, if necessity does not mean the certain connexion between cause and effect, what is it to mean? Is the word to be sent adrift on the dictionary without a meaning? The rooted contradiction in our minds between the notion of freedom of action, and that of being bound by the chain of certain causation, is not to be removed merely by denying us the use of the term by which the contradiction is expressed.

But, again, they say 'You may as well get over this apparent contradiction in life and history between free-will and certain science, for you must get over the apparent contradiction in life and history between free-will and the certain omniscience of the Creator, which comprehends human actions, and which you acknowledge as part of your religious faith.' No doubt this, though an *argumentum ad hominem*, is perfectly relevant, because the objection it meets is one in the minds of those to whom it is addressed ; and I think it has been justly observed, that it cannot be answered by distinguishing between foreknowledge and afterknowledge, because its force lies in the

certainty which is common to all knowledge, not in the relation of time between the knowledge and the thing known. The real answer seems to be this, that the words omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, though positive in form, are negative in meaning. They mean only that we know not the bounds of the knowledge, power, or presence of God. What we do know, if we know anything, is that His presence is not such as to annihilate or absorb our separate being, nor His knowledge and power such as to overrule or render nugatory our free-will.

Nor will it avail the constructors of a science of Man to cite the moral certainty with which we predict the conduct of men or nations whose characters are settled. This settled character was formed by action, and the action by which it was formed was free; so that the uncertain element which baffles science is not got rid of, but only thrown back over a history or a life.

Then they analyse action, and say it follows its motive, and may be predicted from the motive, just as any other consequent in nature follows and may be predicted from its antecedent. It follows *a* motive, but how are we to tell *which* motive it will follow. Action is a choice between motives; even in our most habitual acts it is a choice between acting and rest. The only ground we have for calling one motive the strongest is that it has prevailed before; but the motive which has prevailed before, and prevailed often and long, is set aside in every great change of conduct, individual or national, by an effort of the will, for which, to preserve the chain of causation and the science founded on that chain, some other antecedent must be found.

Action, we said, was a choice between motives. It is important in this inquiry to observe that it is a choice between them, not a compound or a resultant of them all; so that a knowledge of all the motives present at any time to the mind of a man or nation would not enable us to predict the action as we predict the result of a combination of chemical elements or mechanical forces. The motive which is not acted on goes for nothing; and as that motive may be and often is the one which, according to the only test we have, is the strongest, we see what sort of foundation a science of action and history has to build on.

When the action is done, indeed, the connexion between it and its motive becomes necessary and certain; and we may argue backwards from action to motive with all the accuracy of science. Finding at Rome a law to encourage tyrannicide, we are certain that there had been tyrants at Rome, though there is nothing approaching to historical evidence of the tyranny of Tarquin.

Those who would found history or ethics on a necessarian, or, if they will, a causal theory of action, have three things to account for,—our feeling at the moment of action that we are free to do or not to do,—our approving or blaming ourselves afterwards for having done the act or left it undone, which implies that we were free,—and the approbation or blame of each other, which implies the same thing. I do not see that they even touch any of these problems but the first. They do not tell us whether conscience is an illusion or not; nor, if it is not an illusion, do they attempt to resolve for us the curious question, what this strange pricking in the necessary agent means. They do not explain to us why we

should praise or blame, reward or punish each other's good or bad actions, any more than the good or bad effects of anything in the material world; why the virtues and vices of man are to be treated on a totally different footing from the virtues of food or the vices of poison. Praise and blame they do,—praise as heartily and blame at least as sharply as the rest of the world; but they do not tell us why. We must not be deceived by the forms of scientific reasoning, when those who use them do not face the facts.

Great stress is laid by the Necessarians on what are called moral statistics. It seems that, feel as free as we may, our will is bound by a law compelling the same number of men to commit the same number of crimes within a certain cycle, which cycle, curiously enough, coincides with the period of a year naturally selected by the Registrar-General for his reports. But, first, the statistics tendered are not moral, but legal. They tell us only the outward act, not its inward moral character. They set down alike under Murder the act of a Rush or a Palmer, and the act of an Othello. Secondly, we are to draw some momentous inference from the uniformity of the returns. How far are they uniform? M. Quetelet gives the number of convictions in France for the years 1826, '7, '8, '9, severally as 4348, 4236, 4551, 4475. The similarity is easily accounted for by that general uniformity of human nature which we all admit. How is the difference, amounting to more than 300 between one year and the next, to be accounted for except by free-will? But, thirdly, it will be found that these statistics are unconsciously, but effectually, garbled. To prove the law of the uniformity of crime, periods are selected when crime was uniform. Instead of

four years of the Restoration, in which we know very well there was no great outburst of wickedness, give us a table including the civil war between the Burgundians and the Armagnacs, the St. Bartholomew, the Reign of Terror, or the days of June 1848. It will be said, perhaps, that this was under different circumstances; but it is a very free use of the term 'circumstance' to include in it all the evil and foolish actions of men which lead to, or are committed in, a sanguinary revolution. Social and criminal statistics are most valuable; the commencement of their accurate registration will probably be a great epoch in the history of legislation and government; but the reason why they are so valuable is that they are not fixed by necessity, as the Necessarians allege or insinuate, but variable, and may be varied for the better by the wisdom of governments,—governments which Necessarians are always exhorting to reform themselves, instead of shewing how their goodness or badness necessarily arises from the climate or the food. If the statistics were fixed by necessity, to collect them would be a frivolous curiosity, like measuring all the human race when we could not add a cubit to their stature.

It is important when people talk of calculating the probabilities and chances of human action on these statistics, to guard against a loose use (which I think I have seen somewhere noted) of the words probability and chance. Probability relates to human actions, which cannot be calculated unless you can find a certain antecedent for the will. Chance is mere ignorance of physical causes; ignorance in what order the cards will turn up, because we are ignorant in what order they are turned down; and it is difficult to see

by what manipulation out of mere ignorance knowledge can be educed. It is worth remarking also that an average is not a law: not only so, but the taking an average rather implies that no law is known.

But, it may be said, all must give way to a law gathered by fair and complete induction from the facts of history. It is perhaps not so clear why knowledge drawn from within ourselves should give way to knowledge drawn from without. But be that as it may, we may pronounce at once that a complete induction from the facts of history is impossible. History cannot furnish its own inductive law: an induction to be sound must take in, actually or virtually, all the facts. But history is unlike all other studies in this, that she never can have, actually or virtually, all the facts before her. What is past she knows in part; what is to come she knows not, and can never know. The scroll from which she reads is but half unrolled: and what the other half contains, what even the next line contains, no one has yet ventured to foretell. Prediction, the crown of all science, the new science of Man and History has not ventured to put on. That prerogative, which is the test of her legitimacy, she has not yet ventured to exert.

The Positivists fill up their calendar of great men, as though great men had ended with Comte and the course of time were done. Perhaps the future has still something great in store. Science indeed, left to herself, would, if anything, rather lead us to believe that the human race and its history are young. The vast length of geologic compared with the shortness of historic time, whispers that the drama for which the stage was so long preparing must have many acts still to come.

This ignorance of what is to come destroys, it would seem, among other inductive theories of history, the famous one of Comte, who makes the course of history to be determined by the progress of science through its three stages, "Theological," "Metaphysical," and "Positive;"—"Positive" having, let us observe, a convenient double meaning, *atheistical* and *sound*. How can M. Comte tell that the "Positive" era is the end of all? How can he tell that the three stages he has before him are anything but a mere segment of a more extensive law? But besides this, before we proceed to compare a colossal hypothesis with the facts, we have a right to see whether it is rational in itself, and consistent with our previous knowledge. An hypothesis accounting for certain facts by reference to the sun's motion round the earth, or anything else obviously false or absurd, may be dismissed at once without the form of a verification. The three terms of the supposed series, Theological, Metaphysical, and Positive science, must be distinct and successive, or it will be no series at all. Now taking "positive" in the fair sense, the sense of *sound*, Theological and Positive science, the theological and the scientific view of the world, are neither distinct nor successive, but may very well go, and do often go, together. A man may be, and Newton was, a sound astronomer and a great discoverer of astronomical laws, and yet believe that the stars were made and are held in their courses by the hand of God. A man may be, and Butler was, a sound moral philosopher, and a great discoverer of the laws of human nature, and yet believe human nature to be in its origin and end divine. Mr. Buckle cites for our admiration a saying of Lamennais, contrasting, as he supposes, the



religious with the scientific view of things. "Why do bodies gravitate towards each other? Because God willed it, said the ancients. Because they attract each other, says Science." As though God could not will that bodies should attract each other. Polytheism, putting the different parts of nature under the arbitrary dominion of separate gods, conflicts with, and has been overthrown by, science, which proves that one set of laws, the work of one God, traverses the whole. And this I venture to think is the mustard-seed of truth, out of which the vast tree of M. Comte's historical theory has grown. So far from there being any conflict between Monotheism and science, all the discoveries of science confirm the hypothesis that the world was made by one God, an hypothesis which was independent of science, for it was before it. As to the Metaphysical era, which is the intervening term of the series between the Theological and the Positive, nothing in history corresponding to this era has been or can be produced. No age is or can be shewn in which a nation or mankind believed all the phenomena of the world or of human nature to be produced by metaphysical entities. A few philosophers indeed have talked of nature as the mother of all things; but by nature they meant not a metaphysical entity, but either the laws of matter personified, in which case they were Atheists and Positivists, or the God of natural religion as opposed to the God of revelation, in which case they were Theists. So that of the three terms of the supposed series, the first runs into the third and the second vanishes altogether. The theory is open to another objection, which is also fatal. Against all the facts, though in accordance with the bias naturally given to M. Comte's mind by his

scientific pursuits, it makes the scientific faculties and tendencies predominant in man. Which view of science was it that inspired Attila and Timour, who, after all, played a considerable part in determining the course of history ?

If there can be no complete historical induction, it follows that to say that Man is to be studied historically, and that the rule of right action is to be taken, not from our moral instincts, but from history, is for the same reason to say that there shall be no rule of right action at all. The moral code and our moral judgment of characters and actions must always remain in suspense, till the world ends and history is complete. History of itself, in this impossibility of induction, can give man no principle, no object of allegiance, unless it be success. Success accordingly becomes the morality of the consistent Positivist. He canonizes conquerors and tyrants, and consigns to infamy the memory of men who, though they fell, fell struggling for a good cause, and have left a great and regenerating example to mankind. The less consistent Positivist lets his moral instincts get the better of his theory ; and, throwing the historical and the relative to the winds, borrows, without acknowledgment, from Roman Catholic Christianity a system of morals which is not only absolute but mystical. Half the disciples of M. Comte shrink from the plunge, and the two sections seem to have clashed in counter funeral orations over the grave of a teacher who had closed debate.

You may say that virtue has prevailed in history over vice, and that our allegiance is due to it as the strongest. But granting that it has prevailed hitherto, to say which is the strongest you must

see the end of the struggle. The Hobbist theologian is in the same dilemma. He claims our allegiance for the power of good, not on the ground of our sympathy with good, but because it is stronger than the power of evil. He, too, before he says which is the stronger, must see the end of the struggle. If evil prevails, his allegiance must be transferred.

It is true that morality in judging the past must take notice of historical circumstances, as morality takes notice of present circumstances in judging the actions of living men. Allowance must be made for the age, the country, the state of things in which each character moved. In this sense there may be said to be such a thing as historical, in contradistinction to an absolute, morality; though a morality which disregarded the circumstances of actions in history or life would deserve to be called not absolute, but idiotic, and, in fact, has never been propounded. But let the merit or demerit of an historical action vary ever so much with the circumstances, justice has been justice, mercy has been mercy, honour has been honour, good faith has been good faith, truthfulness has been truthfulness, from the beginning; and each of these qualities is one and the same in the tent of the Arab and in the senates of civilized nations. A sound historical morality will sanction strong measures in evil times; selfish ambition, treachery, murder, perjury it will never sanction in the worst of times, for these are the things that make times evil.

Again, institutions not good in themselves may be good for certain times and countries; they may be better than what went before, they may pave the way for something better to follow. Despotism is an improvement on anarchy, and may lead to ordered free-

dom. But there must be limits to our catholicity in the case of institutions as well as in the case of actions. Our toleration here, too, is bounded by morality. It is just possible it may embrace the institution of slavery, if slavery was really a middle term between wars of extermination and a free industrial system. But cannibalism, which we are invited philosophically to accept as useful and amiable in its place, must have been execrable everywhere and in all times.

So, again, it is most true that there is a general connexion between the different parts of a nation's civilization; call it, if you will, a *consensus*, provided that the notion of a set of physical organs does not slip in with that term. And it is most true that the civilization of each nation must, to a certain extent, run its own course. It is folly to force on the most backward nations the laws and government of the most forward, or to offer intellectual institutions to tribes which have not attained the arts of life. But that which is good for all may be given to all, and among the things which are good for all are pure morality and true religion. We cannot at once give a British constitution to the Hindoo; but we may at once, in spite of *consensus* and necessary development, teach him the virtue of truth and the unity of God. The thing may be impossible in the eye of the positive science of history; it is done with difficulty, but it is done.

We have admitted that the philosophy of history is indebted to physical science for habits of methodical reasoning with a view to practical results. From physical science dealing, however wrongly, with history, we also gain a certain calmness and breadth of view, derived from regions in which there is no par-

tizanship or fanaticism, because there are no interests by which partizanship or fanaticism can be inflamed. It is less easy to acknowledge that the student of history is indebted to the physical school of historical philosophy for enlarging our historical sympathies. That school, on the contrary, extinguishes all sympathy in any obvious sense of the word. We can feel love and gratitude for free effort made in the cause of man ; but how can we feel love or gratitude towards the human organ of a necessary progress, any more than towards a happy geological formation or a fertilizing river? On the other hand, it would be easy to give specimens of the sort of sympathy and the sort of language which results from taking a purely scientific view of history and man. "Truth does not regard consequences," was a noble saying ; but there are some cases in which the consequences are a test of truth. As the physical view of character and action, if it really took possession of the mind, must put an end to self-exertion, so the physical view of the history of nations would dissolve the human family by making each nation regard the other as in a course of necessary progress, to be studied scientifically, but not to be hastened or interfered with, instead of their doing all they can to enlighten and improve each other.

We must not suppose that because the order of national actions is often necessary, the actions themselves are. A nation may have to go through one stage of knowledge or civilization before it can reach another, but its going through either is still free. Nations must accumulate a certain degree of wealth before they can have leisure to think or write ; but the lower and more indolent races refuse to accumulate wealth.

We must guard, too, against physical metaphors in talking of history; they bring with them physical ideas, and prejudice our view of the question. Men do not act in *masses*, but in multitudes, each man of which has a will of his own, and determines his action by that will, though on the same motives as the rest. Development is a word proper to physical organs, which cannot be transferred to the course of a nation without begging the whole question. The same thing may be said of social statics and dynamics applied to the order and progress of a nation.

Of course in hesitating to accept the physical view of man, and the exact science founded on that view, we do not deny or overlook the general tendencies of human nature, or the sciences which have been or may be formed on those tendencies when abstracted. In themselves, and till they descend into the actions of particular men or nations, these sciences are exact, and give full play to all those methods of scientific reasoning, of which, once more, physical science seems to be the great school. But let them descend into the actions of particular men and nations, and their exactness ceases. The most exact of them, naturally, is Political Economy, which deals with the more animal part of human nature, where the tendencies are surer because the conflict of motives is less. It seems doubtful whether the tendencies are surer in the case of nations than in the case of men. The course of a nation is often as eccentric, as wayward, as full of heroic and fiendish impulse, as impossible to predict from year to year, from hour to hour, as that of a man. The passions of men are not always countervailed and nullified by those of other men in a nation, they are often intensified by contagion to the

highest degree, and national panic or enthusiasm goes far beyond that of single men. The course of nations, too, is liable to the peculiar disturbing influence of great men, who are partly made by, but who also partly make, their age. A grain more of sand, said Pascal,—say rather a grain less of resolution,—in the brain of Cromwell, one more pang of doubt in the tossed and wavering soul of Luther, and the current of England or the world's history had been changed. The Positivists, while they pretend to deduce all history scientifically from general laws, are so far from really excluding personal influences, that they have made a regular hagiology and demonology of eminent friends of progress and eminent reactionists, as though these, not the laws, ruled the whole; and no higher, not to say more fabulous, estimate of the personal influence of Richelieu and Burke will be found than in the work of a Positivist author who has treated all personal history as unphilosophical gossip, which is now, at last, to give place to a history of general laws. Accidents, too, mere accidents,—the bullet which struck Gustavus on the field of Lützen, the chance by which the Russian lancers missed Napoleon in the churchyard of Eylau, the chance which stopped Louis XVI. in his flight at Varennes, and carried him back to the guillotine,—turn history as well as life, and baffle, to that extent, all law, all tendency, all prevision.

There are some other views, rather than theories, of history, besides the strictly Necessarian theory, which conflict with free-will, and which may be just noticed here.

One is the view, if it should not be rather called a play of fancy, which treats all nations as stereotyped

embodiments of an idea, or the phases of an idea, which is assumed to have been involved in the original scheme of things, in applying this hypothesis to the facts of history. China, which is naturally first fixed on, may by a stretch of imagination be taken to embody a stereotyped idea, though even in China there has been change, and indeed progress, enough to belie the notion. But as to all the more progressive nations, this view is so palpably contradicted by the most glaring facts, that we need hardly go further. We may dispense with asking how an idea, which never was present to any mind but that of a modern philosopher, became embodied in the actions which make up the history of a nation; how it passed in its different phases from nation to nation, and how it happens that its last phase exactly coincides with our time. The half-poetic character of this view is apparent, when we are told that the reason for beginning with China is, that the light of civilization, as well as the light of the sun, must rise in the East; as though the sun rose in China!

Other writers erect some one physical influence, the influence of race, of climate, of food, into a sort of destiny of nations. The importance of these influences is great, and to trace them is a task full of interest and instruction. But man is the same in his moral and intellectual essence, that is, in his sovereign part, whatever his stock, whether he live beneath African suns or Arctic frosts, whether his food be flesh, corn, or a mixture of the two. He is not, as these theorists would make him, the most helpless, but the most helpful of animals; and by his mind applied to building, warming, clothing, makes his own climate; by his mind applied to husbandry and



commerce, modifies his own food. Race seems, of all physical influences, the strongest. Yet how small and superficial is the difference, compared with the agreement, between a cultivated man and a good Christian from London and one from Paris, or even between one from either and one from Benares. To shew how physical influences may be exaggerated by the mania for levelling man with the other subjects of physical science, it may be mentioned that a writer has traced the peculiar civilization of Egypt to the food of the people, which he takes to have been dates. But it happens that the food of the Egyptians was not dates, but corn bread, with vegetables and meat.

There is also a floating notion that the lives of nations are limited by some mysterious law, and that they are born, grow to maturity, and die like men. But no reason can be given why a nation should die; and no nation ever has died, though some have been killed by external force.

Parallels between the political courses of nations are also sometimes pressed too far, and made to seem like a necessary law. Some of the little states of Greece ran a remarkably parallel course, but they were not independent of each other; they were all members of the Greek nation, and influenced each other's politics by contagion, and sometimes by direct interference. A parallel, which seemed curiously exact, was also drawn between the events of the English and French Revolutions: it seemed to hold till the accession of Louis Philippe, but where is it now? The similarity between the two Revolutions was in truth superficial, compared with their dissimilarity. Religion, the main element of the English movement, was wholly wanting in the French: the

flight of the nobility, the confiscation of their estates, and the establishment of a new peasant proprietary, which decided the ultimate character and destiny of the French movement, were wholly wanting in the English. But so far as there was a similarity, it was produced partly by mere general tendencies, which lead to anarchy after gross misgovernment, to a dictatorship after anarchy, and to the attempt to recover freedom after a dictatorship; partly by mere accidents, such as the want of a son and heir in the case both of Charles II. and of Louis XVIII., and the consequent reversion of the crown to a brother, who belonged by age and education to the old state of things. Had Monmouth been Charles's legitimate son, all would have been changed.

Lastly, there is the habit of tracing special providences in history, which sometimes goes the length of making history one vast special providence and turning it into a puppet play, which, our hearts suggest, might have been played with other puppets than Man. Surely it is perilous work to be reading the most secret councils of the Creator by a light always feeble, often clouded by prejudice, often by passion. The massacre of St. Bartholomew seemed a special providence to the papal party of the day. *Te Deums* for bloody victories are perhaps scarcely less profane. Is the scoff of Frederic true, and is Providence always with the best-drilled grenadiers? To a believer in Christianity nothing seems so like a special providence as the preparation made for the coming of Christianity through Greece and Rome, on which a preacher was eloquently enlarging to us the other day. To a believer in Christianity it seems so. But the unbeliever in Christianity says, 'Yes; that is the true account of the matter. Christianity arose from a happy con-

fluence of the Greek and Roman with the Hebrew civilization. This is the source of that excellence which you call divine.' Thus what appears to one side a singular special providence, is used on the other side, and necessarily with equal force, to shew that Christianity itself is no providence at all. The Duke of Weimar spoke more safely when he said of the tyranny of the first Napoleon in Germany, "It is unjust, and therefore it cannot last." He would have spoken more safely still if he had said, 'Last or not last, it is unjust, and being unjust, it carries its own sentence in its heart, and will prove the weakest in the sum of things.'

Is history, then, a chaos because it has no necessary law? There are two grand facts with which the philosophy of history deals,—the division of nations and the succession of ages. Are these without a meaning? If so, the two greatest facts in the world are alone meaningless.

It is clear that the division of nations has entered deeply into the councils of creation. It is secured not only by barriers of sea, mountains, rivers, intervening deserts,—barriers which conquest, the steam-vessel, and the railroad might surmount,—but also by race, by language, by climate, and other physical influences, so potent that each in its turn has been magnified into the key of all history. The division is perhaps as great and as deeply rooted as it could be without destroying the unity of mankind. Nor is it hard to see a reason for it. If all mankind were one state, with one set of customs, one literature, one code of laws, and this state became corrupted, what remedy, what redemption would there be? None, but a convulsion which would rend the frame of society to pieces, and

deeply injure the moral life which society is designed to guard. Not only so, but the very idea of political improvement might be lost, and all the world might become more dead than China. Nations redeem each other. They preserve for each other principles, truths, hopes, aspirations, which, committed to the keeping of one nation only, might, as frailty and error are conditions of man's being, become extinct for ever. They not only raise each other again when fallen, they save each other from falling; they stay each other's steps by sympathy and example; they moderate each other's excesses and extravagances, and keep them short of the fatal point by the mutual action of opinion, when the action of opinion is not shut out by despotic folly. They do for each other nationally very much what men of different characters do for each other morally in the intercourse of life: and that they might do this it was necessary that they should be as they are, and as the arrangements of the world secure their being, at once like and unlike, like enough for sympathy, unlike enough for mutual correction. Conquest, therefore, may learn that it offends, and has in the long run to contend not only against morality but against nature. Two great attempts have been made in the history of the world to crush the nationality of large groups of nations, forming the civilized portion of the globe. The first was made by the military Rome of antiquity; the second, of a qualified kind, was made by the ecclesiastical Rome of the middle ages, partly by priestly weapons, partly by the sword of devout kings. The result was universal corruption, political and social in the first case, ecclesiastical in the second. In both cases aid was brought, and the fortunes of humanity were restored by a power from

without, but for which, it would seem, the corruption would have been hopeless. In the first case, the warlike tribes of the North shivered the yoke of Rome, and after an agony of six centuries, restored the nations. In the second case, Greece rose from the dead with the New Testament in her hand, and breathed into the kindred spirits of the great Teutonic races such love of free enquiry and of liberty, that they rose and rent the bonds of Rome and her Celtic vassals,—rent them, but at the cost of a convulsion which filled the world with blood, and has made mutual hatred almost the law of Christendom from that hour to this. Without the help of Greece it does not appear that the gate of the tomb in which Europe lay would ever have been forced back. She might have been pent in it for ever, like the doomed spirits in Dante when the lid of their sepulchres is closed at the last day. Wickliffe and John Huss spent their force against it in vain. The tyranny might have been differently shared between the different powers of the universal Church, between Pope and Council, between Pope and King: but this change would have done little for liberty and truth. Nationality is not a virtue, but it is an ordinance of nature and a natural bond; it does much good; in itself it prevents none; and the experience of history condemns every attempt to crush it, when it has once been really formed.

To pass to the other grand fact with which the philosophy of history deals,—the succession of ages. It is clear that there runs through the history of the race, or at least of the principal portion of it, we will not say the law, but the fact of progress, and that this progress is natural, being caused by the action of desires and faculties implanted in the nature of man.

It is natural, but it is not like any progress caused by a necessary law. It is a progress of effort, having all the marks of effort as clearly as the life of a man struggling and stumbling towards wisdom and virtue; and it is as being a progress of effort, not a necessary development, that it touches our hearts.

There seems nothing in the fact of progress either degrading to human dignity or pampering to human pride. The dogmatic assertion, that history began in fetichism and cannibalism, is made without a shadow of proof. Those states are assumed at a venture to have been the first, because they are seen to be the lowest, the possibility of their being not original states, but diseases, being left out of sight. As to fetichism, the first hunter or shepherd who swore to another and disappointed him not, though it were to his own hindrance, must have felt the supernatural sanction of duty, and the eternity of moral as contrasted with physical evil; and, therefore, he must implicitly have had in him the two great bases of natural religion,—God and the immortality of the soul. It is *mythology*, of which fetichism is the lowest form, that has its root in nature. *Religion* has its root in man, and man can never have been without religion. As to cannibalism, it seems to be sometimes a frenzy of the warlike passions, sometimes a morbid tendency engendered by the want, in certain islands, of animal food. At all events, it is most unlikely that the original food of man should have been that which is at once most loathsome and most difficult to obtain, since he would have to overcome an animal as strong and cunning as himself. Besides, how can the human race have multiplied if they lived upon each other? The “Vestiges of Creation” went still further,

and made man a mere development of lower natures. But true science “thinks nobly of the soul, and is by no means of that opinion.”

On the other hand, as progress does not imply a state worse than the brutes at the beginning, so it does not imply perfection in the end; though it is not for us to limit the degree of knowledge or excellence which it may have pleased the Creator to render attainable at last by man. The doctrine of progress puts each generation, ours among the number, in its true place. It teaches us that we are the heirs of the past, and that to that heritage we shall add a little, and but a little, before we bequeath it to the future; that we are not the last or the greatest birth of time; that all the ages have not wandered in search of truth, that we might find it pure and whole; that we must plant in all senses, that others may reap the fruit; that we must hand on the torch,—brighter if we do our part,—but that we must hand it on; and that no spasmodic effort will bring us in our span of life and labour to the yet far off goal.

But, welcome or unwelcome, the progress of humanity down to the present time is a fact. Man has advanced in the arts of life, in the wealth which springs from them, in the number which they support, and with the increase of which the aggregate powers and sympathies of the race increase. He has advanced in knowledge, and still advances, and that in the accelerating ratio of his augmented knowledge added to his powers. So much is clear; but then it is said, ‘The progress is intellectual only, not moral; we have discoveries of the intellect increasing in number and value from age to age, whose authors are the proper and sole objects of the world’s gratitude and

love. We have no moral improvement; the moral nature of man remains the same from the beginning, with the same passions and affections, good and evil, which it is confidently added are always in equilibrium. The moral law is the same for all ages and nations; nothing has been added to the Decalogue.' This theory is carried as far as it well can be when it is laid down, not only that the progress of humanity is a progress of the intellect alone, but that the progressive virtue of the intellect lies in scepticism or doubt, the state of mind which suspends all action; and when it is further laid down that moral virtue, so far from causing the progress of humanity, sometimes impedes it, the proof of which is the mischief done in the world by good men who are bigots,—as though bigots were good men.

That the moral law and man's moral nature remain the same throughout history, is true; it is true also that the moral law and moral nature remain the same throughout man's life, from his birth to his old age. But character does not remain the same; the character of the man is continually advancing through life; and in like manner, the character of the race advances through history. The moral and spiritual experience of the man grows from age to age, as well as his knowledge, and produces a deeper and maturer character as it grows. Part of this experience is recorded in religious books, the writings of philosophers, essays, poetry, works of sentiment, tales,—a class of literature which must seem useless and void to those who hold that our progress is one of science alone. In part it is silently transmitted with its increase through the training which each generation gives to the next. We ask why the ancients thought and



wrote so little about the beauties of nature? It certainly was not that they lived in a land less beautiful, or saw its beauties with eyes less keen than ours. But the love of natural beauties is not only in the eye; it requires a certain maturity of sentiment to call out the mute sympathy with which nature is charged for man, to lend their mystery to the forest and the sea, its pensiveness to evening, its moral to the year. When a modern imitates, however skilfully, the poetry of the Greeks, how great is the abnegation of all that most touches our hearts; and yet how much that is beyond the range of Greek sentiment remains! Philanthropy is a Greek word, but how wide a circle of ideas, sentiments, affections, unknown to the Greeks, does its present meaning embrace! In natural religion itself the progress seems not less clear. Man's idea of God must rise as he sees more of Him in His works, as he sees more of Him by reflecting on his own nature, (in which the true proof of natural religion lies,) and in those efforts of human virtue in other men which would be unaccountable if there were no God, and this world were all. More and more, too, from age to age, the ideas of the soul and of a future life rise in distinctness; Man feels more and more that he is a traveller between the cradle and the grave, and that the great fact of life is death; and the centre of human interest moves gradually towards the other world. Man would perhaps have been paralyzed in his early struggle with nature for subsistence, had these deep thoughts then taken too much possession of his mind. His earliest and coarsest wants satisfied, he began to feel other wants, to think of himself and his own destinies, and

to enter on a distinct spiritual life. Those at least began to do so who had leisure, power of mind, and cultivation enough to think, and the reach of whose intellects made them feel keenly the narrow limit of this life. Yet the spiritual life was confined to few, and even in those few it was not of a very earnest kind. The *Phædo* is a graceful work of philosophic art, rather than a very passionate effort to overcome the grave. The Greek, for the most part, rose lightly from the banquet of life to pass into that unknown land with whose mystery speculation had but dallied, and of which comedy had made a jest. The Roman lay down almost as lightly to rest after his course of public duty. But now if death could really regain his victory in the mind of man, hunger and philosophy together would hardly hold life in its course. The latest and most thoroughgoing school of materialism has found it necessary to provide something for man's spiritual nature, and has made a shadowy divinity out of the abstract being of humanity, and a shadowy immortality of the soul out of a figment that the dead are greater than the living. Lucretius felt no such need.

If it could be said that there was no progress in human character because the moral law and the moral nature of man remain the same in all ages, it might equally be said that there could be no variety in character because the moral law and our moral nature are the same in all persons. But the variety of characters which our hearts, bound to no one type, acknowledge as good, noble, beautiful, is infinite, and grows with the growing variety of human life. It ranges from the most rapt speculation to the most

vigorous action, from the gentlest sentiment to the most iron public duty, from the lowliest flower in the poetry of Wordsworth to that grand failure, Milton's picture of the fallen Archangel, who lacks the great notes of evil, inasmuch as he is not mean or selfish, but is true to those who have fallen by him, for them braves a worse fate than the worst, and for them amidst despair wears hope upon his brow. The observance of the moral law is the basis and condition, as the common moral nature is the rudiment, of all excellence in human character. But it is the basis and condition only: it is negative, whereas character is positive, and wins our reverence and affection because it is so. The Decalogue gives us no account of heroism or the emotions it excites; still less does it give us an account of that infinite variety of excellences and graces which is the beauty of history and life, and which we cannot doubt the great and ever-increasing variety of situations in history and life were intended by the Creator to produce.

If the end and the key of history is the formation of character by effort, the end and key of history are the same with the end and key of the life of man. If the progress of the intellect is the essential part of history, then the harmony between man and history is at an end. Man does not rest in intellect as his end, not even in intellect of a far less dry and more comprehensive kind than that which the maintainers of the intellect theory of history have in view. If all mankind were Hamlets it would scarcely be a happier world. Suppose intellect to be the end of Man, and all moral effort, all moral beauty, even all poetry, all sentiments, must go for nothing; they are

void, meaningless, and vain ;—an account of the matter which hardly corresponds with the meaning and fitness (not to assume design) which we see in every part of the physical world. Certainly, if we believe in a Creator, it is difficult to imagine Him making such a world as this, with all its abysses of misery and crime, merely that some of His creatures might with infinite labour attain a modicum of knowledge which can be of use only in this world, and must come to nothing again when all is done. But if the formation of character by effort is the end, everything has a meaning, everything has a place. A certain degree of material well-being, for which man naturally exerts himself, is necessary to character which is coarse and low, where the life of man is beast-like, miserable and short. Intellect and the activity of intellect enter (we need not here ask how) deeply into character. For the beauty of intellectual excellence the world forgives great weakness, though not vice ; and all attempts to cast out intellect and reduce character to emotion, even religious emotion, have produced only a type which is useless to society, and which every healthy taste in character has rejected. And certainly, if character is the end of history, and moral effort the necessary means to that end, (as no other means of forming character is known to us,) optimism may, after all, not be so stupid as some philosophers suppose ; and this world, which is plainly enough so arranged as to force man to the utmost possible amount of effort, may well be the best of all possible worlds.

We must pause before the question how deep the unity of humanity and the unity of history goes ;

how far those who, through all the ages, have shared in the long effort, with all its failures, errors, sufferings, will share in the ultimate result; how far those who have sown will have their part in the harvest, those who have planted in the fruit; how far the future of our race as well as the past is ours. That is a secret that lies behind the veil.



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